

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PINS, UK

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND VIOLENCE -- FIRE BOMB CAMPAIGN

REF: BELFAST 279

1. THE LATE AUGUST WAVE OF SHOOTINGS OF SOLDIERS AND POLICEMEN, DESCRIBED IN REFTEL, LASTED ONLY A WEEK. SINCE THEN, THERE HAS BEEN A MORE NORMAL TYPE OF SEPARATE INCIDENTS -- TWO KILLINGS OF ULSTER DEFENSE REGIMENT (ARMY TYPE RESERVE) PERSONNEL, AN INEFFECTUAL FIRING AT AN ARMY ARMORED CAR, TWO BURNED BUSES, A SEPTEMBER 22 MURDER ATTEMPT OF A CIVILIAN, AND IN THE PAST WEEK OR TWO, MOSTLY IN BELFAST, A DOZEN KNEE-CAPPINGS.

2. IN CONTRAST, THE SUSTAINED ACTIVITY HAS BEEN FIRE BOMBING OF BUSINESS PREMISES, MANY IN BELFAST BUT ALSO IN THE BELFAST SUBURBS, LONDONDERRY, AND IN SMALLER TOWNS. ONE ROUND OCCURRED BEFORE THE QUEEN'S AUGUST VISIT. THERE WERE ANOTHER TEN FIRES TWO WEEKS LATER, THEN SEVEN, ANOTHER FOUR TWO WEEKS AGO, TEN LAST WEEK, AND A HALF DOZEN IN BELFAST THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 22-23. IN ALMOST ALL CASES, THE BOMBS WERE LEFT IN THE PREMISES

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AND TIMED TO IGNITE DURING THE EARLY MORNING. MANY WERE FOUND BEFORE IGNITION, AND SEVERAL ARRESTS WERE MADE, OFTEN OF WOMEN OR GIRLS.

3. THESE BOMBINGS ARE LESS RISKY FOR THE ASSAILANTS AND HAVE PRODUCED NO VICTIMS. PROPERTY DAMAGE HAS BEEN EXTENSIVE, BUT MORE IMPORTANT IS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL

DAMAGE -- PROLONGING THE ATMOSPHERE OF UNCERTAINTY AND TENSION IN NORTHERN IRELAND. IN THE MOST RECENT ROUND IN DOWNTOWN BELFAST, FOR EXAMPLE, TWO PROMINENT STORES AND THREE OF THE FOUR MOVIE HOUSES STILL PLAYING WERE DAMAGED -- ONE OF THE LATTER HEAVILY. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT MORALE FACTOR IN A CAPITAL WHERE ENTERTAINMENT FACILITIES ARE VERY LIMITED.

4. ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE, A 21 YEAR OLD PROVISIONAL IRA GUNMAN TURNED HIMSELF IN TO THE POLICE IN FEBRUARY. HE PLED GUILTY SEPTEMBER 22 TO ARMED ROBBERY, POSSESSION OF FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES, AND IRA MEMBERSHIP IN 1973-74. IN LIGHT OF HIS CHANGE OF HEART AND COURAGE IN GOING TO THE POLICE, THE JUDGE GAVE HIM A TWO-YEAR SUSPENDED SENTENCE. THE YOUNG MAN, OF COURSE, WILL HAVE TO LEAVE NORTHERN IRELAND TO AVOID BEING DISCIPLINED.

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